

# ISIS FOCUS



• PP 5054/11/2012 (031098)

• Issue No. 8 • August 2013



- ♦ *Return on Investment in Education:  
More for Less ..... 1*
- ♦ *Pride of the People: South Korea and  
Korean Nationalism ..... 4*



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA  
[www.isis.org.my](http://www.isis.org.my)

Limited Circulation



## ABOUT ISIS MALAYSIA

The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia was established on 8 April 1983, in realization of a decision made by the Malaysian Government to set up an autonomous, not-for-profit research organization that would act as the nation's think-tank. ISIS Malaysia was envisioned to contribute towards sound public policy formulation and discourse.

The research mandate of ISIS therefore spans a wide area. It includes economics, foreign policy and security studies, social policy, and technology, innovation, environment and sustainability.

ISIS Malaysia today fosters dialogue and promotes the exchange of views and opinions at both national and international levels. It undertakes research in collaboration with national and international organizations, in important areas such as national development and international affairs.

ISIS Malaysia also engages actively in Track Two diplomacy, fostering high-level dialogues at national, bilateral and regional levels, through discussions with influential policymakers and thought leaders.

## RESEARCH

### Economics

Research in this area is generally aimed at promoting rapid and sustained economic growth and equitable development in the nation. We study specific (rather than generic) issues that concern the nation's competitiveness, productivity, growth and income. Areas of research include macroeconomic policy, trade and investment, banking and finance, industrial and infrastructure development and human capital and labour market development. The objective of all our research is to develop actionable policies and to spur institutional change.

### Foreign Policy and Security Studies

The primary aim of this programme is to provide relevant policy analyses on matters pertaining to Malaysia's strategic interests as well as regional and international issues, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific Region. These include security studies, foreign policy, Southeast Asian politics and military affairs.

## Social policy

Demographic and socio-cultural trends are changing Malaysian society and the social policy programme was established to respond to these developments. Research in this area is concerned with effective nation building, and fostering greater national unity. In particular, we look at issues involving the youth, women and underprivileged communities. In conducting its research, ISIS Malaysia networks with non-governmental organizations and civil society groups.

## Technology, Innovation, Environment & Sustainability (TIES)

The TIES programme provides strategic foresight, collaborative research and policy advice to the public sector, businesses and policy audiences, on technology, innovation, environment and sustainable development. Its focus includes green growth as well as energy, water and food security. Towards this end, TIES has been active in organizing dialogues, forums, policy briefs and consultancies.

## HIGHLIGHTS

ISIS Malaysia has, among others, researched and provided concrete policy recommendations for:

- Greater empowerment and revitalization of a national investment promotion agency;
- A strategic plan of action to capitalize on the rapid growth and development of a vibrant Southeast Asian emerging economy;
- A Master Plan to move the Malaysian economy towards knowledge-based sources of output growth;
- The conceptualization of a national vision statement;
- Effective management and right-sizing of the public sector; and
- Strengthening of ASEAN institutions and co-operation processes.

ISIS Malaysia has organized the highly regarded Asia-Pacific Roundtable, an annual conference of high-level security policymakers, implementers and thinkers, since 1986.

## INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING

As a member of the Track Two community, ISIS Malaysia participates in the following networks:

- ASEAN-ISIS network of policy research institutes;
- Council for Security and Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific (CSCAP);
- Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT); and
- Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC).

It is also a partner institute of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

## Editorial Team

Steven Wong  
Susan Teoh  
Thangam K Ramnath

## Design

Razak Ismail  
Jefri Hambali

## Photography

Jefri Hambali / Halil Musa

Published by

Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

No. 1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin

P.O. Box 12424, 50778 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: +603 2693 9366

Fax: +603 2691 5435

Email: [info@isis.org.my](mailto:info@isis.org.my)

Website: [www.isis.org.my](http://www.isis.org.my)

# Return on Investment in Education: More for Less\*

*Dato' Dr Siti Zaleha Binti Abdullah Sani*

*Senior Fellow, ISIS Malaysia*

Studies on successful economies have provided evidence of the economic importance of education in the development of human capital. This view, suggesting a correlation between education on one hand and human capital development and economy on the other, raises strong opposition in those who say that, at best, the evidence is circumstantial and therefore weak. This analysis they say neglects to include drop-outs, women, and minorities who have become successful despite limited education opportunities. According to this view, there is no causal significance in the inequality of education to the income earned due to better education.

***...education is about acquisition of knowledge for knowledge first...***

Equating education to higher income is opposed to the ideals of education, where education is about acquisition of knowledge for knowledge first, and where the educated person, as a member of the human race, contributes positively to the world with the acquired knowledge. Only then should education be viewed as a means to a better income and better life. The latter view, which some say is a materialistic approach to education and learning, however, has been the cornerstone of many successful migrant

*\*An abridged version of this article, entitled: Finding a Return on Investment in Education, was published in the New Straits Times, 9 July 2013.*



*Students working on a project*

communities, and economies. Studies in migrant social mobility have reported an upward movement in the social strata and economic status among communities have been achieved within one generation through investment for the best education of the children of the first generation of migrants.

While the debate on what education is for continues, ISIS Malaysia in a report in July 2002, pointed out that due to a situation brought about, then, by high economic growth averaging seven per cent annually, there was a need for Malaysia to prepare a high quality workforce with much greater value-added in order to move Malaysia towards a higher status.

The report recommended that Malaysia's industry-based economy be reviewed to remain competitive with First World economies that were transforming into service-dominated economies. In order to make this quantum leap from Third World economy to First World economy, Malaysia requires a quality workforce that will keep the nation on the competitive edge.

***...Malaysia spends more on nearly everything related to education compared to other countries that have been more successful economically...***

It is therefore not unexpected that government expenditure of 3.8 per cent in education is reportedly higher than the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) reported average of 3.4 per cent, reinforcing the view of the strong link between education and economic development. In 2011, the Ministry of Education was given RM37 billion or 16 per cent of the total federal budget which is 3.8 per cent higher than that of the ASEAN countries and an average of 1.8 per cent and 1.6 per cent higher than South Korea and Japan respectively. The numbers crunching can continue and it will show that Malaysia spends more on nearly everything related to education compared to other countries that have been more successful economically, and on human capital development, improving the quality of education for less.



*A primary school classroom in session*

So why have these investments not brought about the expected dividends? Job prospects for students who underachieve are bleak. The unskilled jobs which were available for employment 20 years ago are becoming fewer in the knowledge-based economy. The agriculture and fishing industry, for example, requires a workforce with knowledge far beyond the tilling of fields and the netting of fish. Yet basic education, education at higher institutions, and training have somehow yet to show strong dividends in human capital development to sufficiently meet or exceed the demand for suitable talent.

Employers continue to lament that new graduates seeking jobs are unequipped with the basic skills needed for employment in this millennium, such as the ability to articulate thoughts clearly, to engage in discussion, and to demonstrate cognitive agility as to the task at hand. The consequences of unmet needs are translated into unemployment. Young Malaysians joining the workforce are unable to compete with the best and the brightest young talents being engaged from abroad to fulfill the demand for them.

Education at the tertiary level has become primarily focused on the acquiring of knowledge and skills so that the student can gain employment upon graduation. This focus needs to be reviewed in order to prepare talents for employment in businesses and services yet to be discovered. Undergraduate courses and training tailored for specific vocations and employment

***Education at the tertiary level has become primarily focused on the acquiring of knowledge and skills so that the student can gain employment upon graduation***





*Graduation joy*

are in danger of reducing the capacity of talent for new jobs in new industries or other employment possibilities in the event the jobs they are trained for are no longer available or necessary.

University courses therefore need to address the long-term needs of human resource development in preparing a pool of talent that is flexible, and capable of adjusting to the new demands, skills and knowledge that may be required in unknown territory.

The ability to think coherently, reason, and articulate, is more enduring and leads to flexibility in the long-term than going for specialised courses that train talents for only one particular function.

It is, however, tough to sell the idea that liberal arts courses such as sociology, psychology and history that emphasise thinking and reasoning, are good for future employment, not only to parents who are a strong party in making decisions for the future of their children, but to the students themselves. This situation is not helped by, for instance, employers in an engineering firm, who demand that their employees be capable of thinking and reasoning, but think twice about employing, for instance, a history graduate in a management capacity in their firm. The

perception however remains that the engineer is also capable of management functions and therefore will be more valuable to the company.

As the debate swirls around education and economic advancement, there is a real danger of the ideals of education being traded in for the hollow excellence of an employable work force. The art of thinking beyond vocational specialism is lost in the race for immediate employment. It is not a zero sum game but a reminder that education must also instil values that remind us of who we are and why we are being educated.

# Pride of the People: South Korea and Korean Nationalism

*Seow Jing Yin*  
*Intern, ISIS Malaysia*

The July 6 plane crash in San Francisco airport that killed three passengers caused guilt amongst South Koreans because the flight was operated by South Korea's second-largest flag carrier Asiana Airlines. President Park Geun-hye published a statement of regret and the chief executive of Asiana Airlines apologized, not only to the passengers and their families, but to the entire South Korean nation.<sup>1</sup> Being a strongly united race, South Koreans felt a shared sense of responsibility over the incident. They are embarrassed over how it will reflect on their country and worried that it could tarnish the Republic's image worldwide.

And of course South Koreans feel proud and honoured when their nationals succeed internationally, as when Ban Ki-moon was appointed Secretary-General of the United Nations and Kim Jim-yong became President of the World Bank. Their enormous nationalistic spirit engenders a great sense of collective pride as well as shame.

Nationalism is a widespread ideological force in the modern world, supporting the nation-building of newly-independent countries. It has different meanings. To Miscevic,<sup>2</sup> nationalism is comprised of two fundamental values: the attitude of the citizens of a nation in caring about their identity as citizens of that nation, and the actions taken by citizens in seeking to achieve or sustain some form of political sovereignty.

For the South Koreans who experienced two distressing historical events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, nationalism was a prominent factor in their nation-building. It helped them recover from the trauma of colonization and war. Koreans have exhibited a strong sense of national pride,

and worked diligently to break away from the misery of colonization and war. The nationalistic feeling among South Koreans is vibrant; they feel connected to their country, and are inspired to participate actively in improving it.

During the 1950s, South Korea was identified as one of the poorest countries in the world and remained so for over a decade. The 35 years of Japanese occupation and the three-year Korean War that resulted in the split of the country into two caused enormous economic losses and huge casualties devastating the South Koreans. Nevertheless they understood the importance of letting go and focusing on the reconstruction of their nation. Nationalism has been the stimulus for South Koreans in the rebuilding of their country through hard work.

Today, South Korea, with its weighty economic position, has risen from poverty to become one of the most influential states in the world. It is a member of the G20<sup>3</sup> major economies and is ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the world economy as at 2011. It has a total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$ 1.116 trillion according to World Bank statistics.<sup>4</sup> South Koreans proudly attribute their economic miracle to the strong solidarity amongst them.

## South Korean National Identity

South Korean national identity is based on ethnic homogeneity.<sup>5</sup> The population of South Korea in 2011 was 49.78 million, 97.25 per cent of them ethnic Koreans. This single ethnic society facilitated the smooth spread of the nationalistic sentiment among the people. Their strong sense of unity and national pride stem from an identity based on a common bloodline and a shared ancestry.

***The South Korean national identity is based on ethnic homogeneity***

The Koreans have a common belief that their country was established when Dangun, the legendary son of the Heavenly God and a woman from a bear-totem tribe established the first kingdom, namely the Gojoseon, dating back to 2333 B. C.<sup>6</sup> This belief is seen in the proclamation of October 3 as the National Foundation Day, a public holiday to honour and commemorate the establishment of Gojoseon. Having faith in the Dangun myth, Koreans proclaim themselves descendants of the bear, unlike the Chinese who identify themselves as descendants of the dragon.

The Korean language is another aspect that unites ethnic Koreans. Hangeul is the unique Korean alphabet created in 1446 by King Sejong the Great and scholars of that period.<sup>7</sup> Before the creation of Hangeul, Koreans borrowed Chinese characters to express themselves in writing. The common people found Chinese characters both difficult and time-consuming to learn. Hence, only the noble class managed to express their thoughts in writing.

King Sejong, feeling pity for his populace, worked together with scholars to develop an alphabet that could be easily learned by everyone. He officially announced the new alphabet in 1446. It includes 17 consonants and 11 vowels, which, in various combinations, make up all the sounds of the Korean language. The creation of Hangeul effectively distinguished ethnic Koreans from neighbouring societies such as the Chinese and Japanese.

**Nationalism: Benefits and Disadvantages**

The influence of nationalism can be examined from two perspectives: it can be a positive or a

destructive force. There are three benefits. The *first* benefit of nationalism is that it discourages imperialism. Nationalism was the driving force for colonized countries in their gaining of independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eighty-five per cent of global nationalistic movements were initiated to oppose colonial or feudal-absolutist rule.<sup>8</sup> Territorial nationalism can be interpreted as anti-colonial. Nationalism is the desire to reject various economic controls and foreign pretensions to cultural superiority.

Japan, through her conquest and rule of Korea, caused the awakening and sustaining of Korean nationalism,<sup>10</sup> providing a negative, yet most powerful motivator for it to grow — a national enemy. Japanese colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula for about 35 years was seen as involving political suppression, economic exploitation, and cultural assimilation.<sup>11</sup>

Under Japan's iron-fisted rule, Koreans endured severe living conditions for years. They struggled to regain their state autonomy and dignity. Their common desire to restore their cultural, economic and political identity and to expel the Japanese from their homeland was seen in their constant resistance to Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and that developed into sustained nationalism. Japanese imperialism in Korea ultimately ended when Japan surrendered during the Second World War.

The *second* benefit of nationalism is that it boosts economic development. Nationalistic sentiment helped in the economic growth of the 1960s. The 1950-53 Korean War led to a wide rift

***The creation of Hangeul effectively distinguished ethnic Koreans from neighbouring societies such as the Chinese and Japanese***

### *Japan, through her conquest and rule of Korea, caused the awakening and sustaining of Korean nationalism*

among the Koreans with the division of the nation into North and South Korea. An estimated three million people lost their lives as a result of the three-year battle. Besides, the country's economy suffered serious destruction. Infrastructure such as roads, government buildings, and bridges were destroyed, together with half of all homes.<sup>12</sup>

The South Korean GDP per capita in the 1950s was below US\$100.<sup>13</sup> The United States provided huge economic assistance to maintain order and stability in the economy<sup>14</sup> and assisted in the postwar reconstruction programme. Thus, the South Korean economy was heavily reliant on US support from 1953 to 1960.

This changed under the administration of Park Chung-hee. Park was the third South Korean President to seize power through a military *coup d'état*, in 1961. He was in power for 18 years until his assassination in 1979. The leadership of Park Chung-hee was viewed both positively and negatively. He was criticized for being a dictator, disallowing any form of opposition to his authoritarian government. He did not hesitate to use force to gain absolute obedience from the people. Park justified his dictatorship by stating that absolute control of the people was necessary to develop the economy.

On the other hand, Park illustrated strong leadership that led to rapid economic growth. Despite his controversial rule, Park Chung-hee's contribution in transforming South Koreans from rags to riches was undeniable.

The economic plan proposed by Park Chung-hee would not have succeeded without the support of the masses that were encouraged by Park's foresight in helping their country prosper.

One of the predominant factors leading to Korea's economic growth was an ample supply of high quality workers. The lack of natural resources and capital was compensated for by a diligent human work force. Koreans worked an average of fifty hours per week in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>15</sup> A favourite phrase in the daily life of South Koreans today is *pali-pali*, meaning 'being fast.' Their collective willingness to sacrifice for the well-being of their nation together with effective economic policy led to the success of their industrialization causing South Korea to change from a country which was once a receiver of foreign aid to one that now provides it.

*Thirdly*, nationalism promotes democracy. Democracy is the idea that political power is held lawfully by the people and that the governments who exercise that power only act as the agents of the people.<sup>16</sup> The spirit of nationalism encouraged South Koreans to seek an end to the military dictatorship of their country. They fought for political democratization in the 1980s, courageously challenging the military government of President Chun Doo-hwan.<sup>17</sup>

The assassination of President Park Chung-hee in 1979 gave Koreans the hope of democracy. They were desirous of a civilian government ruled by the people for the benefit of the people. However, sadly, military style ruling continued as Chun Doo-hwan seized power through a *coup d'état* in 1979. Infuriated by the continued suppressive dictatorship of the nation



Workers in a Korean garment factory



since the Korean War, and demanding a transparent and just government through a direct presidential election system, the people frequently organized street protests to force the military government to change.

The democratization battle was finally won in 1987 when the Chun Doo-hwan regime surrendered ruling power. Since then, democratic governance has prevailed in South Korea. At present, the South Korean head of state, the president, is chosen by means of the direct presidential election system.

From the examples above, it can be seen that nationalism serves as a medium to strengthen the unity of the people. However, while nationalism has reinforced the coherence of ethnic Koreans, it is also feared that it would distance them from others. One of the negative traits of nationalism is the lack of concern for others. People feel a sense of duty to facilitate only their own people. South Koreans value overseas Koreans more than foreigners staying in Korea. Upsetting events involving others evoke less notice as opposed to such events happening to Koreans which provoke outraged reactions.

Koreans feel that being tied together by a common bloodline, it is their responsibility to ensure the well-being of their own people. Nationalism might also result in the development of exceptionalism (the belief of the people of a nation that their nation is better than other nations) and xenophobia (the suspicion, dislike, or fear of other nationalities) among the people. This negative side of nationalism is that it might instill hatred for other nations or cultures and seek the advancement of the well-being of one's own nation at the expense of others.<sup>18</sup>

The South Korean government and people were deeply ashamed of the involvement of Korean-born American resident, Cho Seung-hui in the 2007 Virginia Tech Massacre.<sup>19</sup> President Roh Moo-hyun even publicly apologized for the



*Display of Korean nationalism*

behaviour of the Korean gunman and expressed his deepest condolences to the American people.<sup>20</sup> Though the killing was in the United States and viewed by Americans as an individual act by Cho, South Koreans felt a collective sense of unease and guilt.

On the other hand, some South Koreans expressed discomfort about Philippines-born Jasmine Lee being elected the first non-ethnic Korean assemblyman in the 2012 Congressional Election.<sup>21</sup> Although Lee is a naturalized citizen (citizenship granted by the government after the person fulfills specific immigration requirements) of South Korea, she is still viewed as an outsider as she is not ethnically Korean.

Typically, a Korean is someone born to Korean parents, who speaks Korean and has Korean looks and nationality.<sup>22</sup> Koreans do not think someone is a Korean just because he or she has a Korean citizenship. They have been taught to be proud of being ethnically homogenous over a long period of time. While there has been a high influx of foreigners into the country in recent years Koreans are adapting to the change slowly.

Many scholars have criticized nationalism as obsolete and extreme in the current globalized world. Some scholars even predict its decline and demise. Such predictions are, however, highly speculative; nationalism remains a key element, a powerful force and in countries like South Korea, an influential instrument.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, 2013, *For South Koreans, high-profile jet crash point of shame*, accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013, available at: <[http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-07-09/world/40455527\\_1\\_south-koreans-korea-inc-korean-life](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-07-09/world/40455527_1_south-koreans-korea-inc-korean-life)>.

<sup>2</sup> Miscevic, N 2010, *Nationalism, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2013, available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/nationalism/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Members of The Group of Twenty that comprises of the 20 major economies in the world, represent almost 90 per cent of global GDP and 80 per cent of international global trade.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, 2012, *Korea Republic*, accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2012, available at: <[http://data.worldbank.org/country/korea-republic#cp\\_wdi](http://data.worldbank.org/country/korea-republic#cp_wdi)>.

<sup>5</sup> Shin, GW 2006, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

<sup>6</sup> Korea Overseas Information Service, 2003, *Facts about Korea* (Seoul: Government Information Agency).

<sup>7</sup> Choy, BY 1982, *Korea A History* (Japan: Charles E. Tuttle).

<sup>8</sup> Yaakub, A 2010, *Nationalism: The Issue of Territorial Disputes between Malaysia and Indonesia In the Celebes Sea* (Sarawak: UNIMAS).

<sup>9</sup> Breuilly, J 1993, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

<sup>10</sup> Lee, CS 1963, *the Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press).

<sup>11</sup> Choy, BY 1982, *Korea A History* (Japan: Charles E. Tuttle).

<sup>12</sup> Tudor, D 2012, *Korea: The Impossible Country* (China: Tuttle).

<sup>13</sup> Kim, YK 1978, *A Handbook of Korea* (Seoul: Ministry of Culture and Information).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Korea Overseas Information Service, 2003, *Facts about Korea* (Seoul: Government Information Agency).

<sup>16</sup> Rourke, JT & Boyer, MA 2006, *International Politics on the World Stage*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (USA: McGrawHill).

<sup>17</sup> Lee, GS, 2007, *Korea: More Accurate Facts and Information* (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies).

<sup>18</sup> Rourke, JT & Boyer, MA 2006, *International Politics on the World Stage*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., McGrawHill, USA.

<sup>19</sup> Thirty three people were killed on the campus of Virginia Tech as a result of what appeared to be a shooting rampage.

<sup>20</sup> Choe, SH & Norimitsu, O 2007, *South Koreans React to Shooting in Virginia*, New York Times, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013, available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/18/world/asia/18cnd-korea.html>>.

<sup>21</sup> Choe, SH 2012, *In Changing South Korea, Who Counts as "Korean"?*, New York Times, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013, available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/world/asia/demographic-shifts-redefine-society-in-south-korea.html?pagewanted=all>>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

## *NOTES*



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA  
No. 1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin  
PO Box 12424, 50778 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia  
Tel : +603 2693 9366  
Fax : +603 2691 5435  
Email : [info@isis.org.my](mailto:info@isis.org.my)  
Website : [www.isis.org.my](http://www.isis.org.my)

